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ABSTRACT

In April 1987, Vancouver Community College (VCC) instituted a career development program in the theater arts department. The program was designed to encourage senior theater students to focus on career goals and prepare for self-employment. The program emphasized that an actor is his/her own small business, with responsibility for creating his/her own career and managing taxes and finances. The content of the course was a combination of career planning, methods of self-marketing, and taxation and financial planning information. The major course projects were the development of a self-generated employment project and of a comprehensive plan for a co-op theatrical production. Additional assignments focused on the development of a comprehensive portfolio of employment-seeking materials, including a resume, photographs, and audition songs and monologues. Role playing and student presentations were used to ensure that students had extensive practice in presenting themselves and critiquing others' performances. One year after the pilot offering of the course, the majority of the 11 participating students rated it as a valuable contribution to preparing them for their careers. All of those who were successfully employed as actors felt that the course helped improve their career focus and their ability to market themselves. An outline of the 12-week course is attached. (JMC)

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THE ACTOR AS A SMALL BUSINESS

A Review of The Career Development Program For STUDIO 58

by

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The following is a synopsis of a pilot project of the Theatre Arts Program, Vancouver Community College conducted with eleven (11) senior theatre students during 1987-88. The intent of the program was to encourage senior students to focus on career goals and prepare for the self-employment dimensions of their profession.

1.0 Background

In April of 1987, Ms. Katheryn Shaw, Coordinator of the Theatre Arts Program, Langara Campus, and Mr. Glen Witter, Coordinator of Small Business Training at Vancouver Community College, produced a program concept to inculcate self-employment awareness within the Theatre Arts program.

Subsequently, funds were allocated, curricula developed and a suitable instructor selected. In the Fall semester of 1987, eleven (11) students, in their final term of the Theatre Arts Program participated in the pilot course.

Program Concept:

It was felt actors/actresses needed training to be prepared to assume the responsibilities for their career development. As most are self-employed, it was reasoned they would be better prepared for their profession if they obtained some business skills and self-employment awareness. If they were to consider themselves as business entities, their chances of developing a successful career may be greatly improved. The opportunity to identify and evaluate career/business opportunities and the development of a career plan during the course could serve to focus individual goals and resolve thus enabling some to achieve their career advancement and financial goals earlier. Awareness of basic financial and tax fundamentals may serve to avoid costly financial mistakes and promote achievement of financial goals. Two fundamental points would be stressed:

1. The actor is his or her own small business;

2. It is the responsibility of each actor to create their own career and manage their finances.

Content:

The content of the course was a combination of career planning, methods of marketing oneself, and taxation and financial planning. Within the career planning category,in addition to traditional career considerations, students would be exposed to a lateral thought process to develop self-generated employment ideas.

Methodology:

Instruction was divided into thirteen (13) two (2) hour weekly sessions. The development and presentation of a self-generated employment project and a comprehensive plan for a co-op production were the major projects for the course. In addition, minor assignments during the term built toward each student possessing a comprehensive portfolio of employment-seeking material from resumes, photographs and audition songs and monologues and extensive practice in presenting and critiquing the same. Extensive use of role playing and student presentation was employed.

Peer Reference:

The selection of the instructor was considered fundamental to the success of the program. It was decided to select a successful actor who subscribed to the reasoning that an actor is his or her own small business and who had sufficient breadth of business skills. Guest instructors, all with theatre backgrounds, were selected to give classes on specialty subjects. It was felt that role models would provide added motivation.

Results:

One year after the course, the majority of participants rated the course as a valuable contribution to preparing them for their careers. One individual has followed the self-employment portion of the course literally and occupies her time between theatre engagements as a street actor (busker) claiming good revenue from the activity. Two (2) individuals formed a theatre company and have produced two successful shows. They are viable and developing a third show. One portion of the course dealt with actor co-operatives which proved valuable to three(3) graduates who were employed under a government grant to develop lunch time and late night theatre productions for a local theatre. Of the other students from the class, one has yet to graduate and the others are successfully employed as actors. Of those successfully employed as actors, all felt the course helped improve their career focus and the ability to market themselves.

Conclusion:

Inculcation of self-employment/career planning training within the Theatre Arts program is valuable. Contrary to other methods of small business training whereby the students may be bunched in with students of dissimilar background and needs, the development of the course entirely in relation to the needs of the actor, a combination of job search skills and self-employment awareness, presented by successful peers, provides a unique contribution to the Theatre Arts Program. The curriculum is now entrenched in the Theatre Arts program and another theatre school has shown interest in the curriculum.

May 21, 1989

CAREER DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM FOR STUDIO 58.

AUGUST 13 1987.
ROBERT D. MCQUEEN.

COURSE CONTENT:

1.	Class introduction.	Sept. 8
2.	Glen Witter.	Sept. 15
3.	Tools of the trade.	Sept. 22
4.	Career goals.	Sept. 29
5.	Presentation.	Oct. 6
6.	Auditioning for film and T.V.	Tues. Oct. 20 12:00 - 5:00 Wed. Oct. 21 2:00 - 5:00
7.	Auditioning for musical theatre	Thurs. Oct. 22 11:30 - 1:30 Tues. Nov. 24 11:30 - 5:30
8.	Mock theatre auditions.	Thurs. Nov. 26
9.	Equity and ACTRA.	Oct. 27
10.	Casting directors, agents, artistic directors.	Nov. 3 11:15 - 1:15
11.	Taxation and financial planning	Nov. 10
12.	Self generated employment project	Dec. 1 1:00 - 4:00
13.	Project presentation and wrap up.	Dec. 3 2:00 - 4:00

CAREER DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM FOR STUDIO 58.

SESSION ONE. 2 HOURS

***Introduction to the class**

-An explanation of the purpose of the class and a brief out line of what will be covered during the term.

***Being self employed.**

-The actor as his or her own small business.
-This discussion will focus on the responsibility of each actor to create their own career.

***Sturcture of the industry.**

-Discussion of how the film and television industry and the theatre are structured.
-Explanation of each career group and what their function is.
-How and where the actor fits into the overall structure.
-History on how the industry structure came about.
-See page A.

***Career vision.**

-Each student writes a word picture of how they want their career to look.
-The word picture should be written in the present tense as if their career vision is already a reality.
-Students should not restrict themselves to what may seem "appropriate" for their careers but instead allow full range of their imagination for their vision.
-After the students have had time to write out their career vision they each read it to the group.
-Discussion on the purpose of having a career vision.

***Term projects. Assignment of the terms 2 largest projects.**

Self generated employment.

-To be presented at the end of the term.
-Students may work in a group or alone
-The focus of this project is to have the students generate their own employment.
-Examples of self generated employment.
  -street theatre.
  -theatre in education.
  -prison theatre program.

The idea for this project will be presented mid term with a full performance at the end of the term.

Co-op Plan.

-To be presented at the end of the term.
-The students will be put into groups of 3 or 4 and must create on paper a full plan for a co-op production.
-Explanation of co-ops and how they work under Canadian Actors Equity.
-Copies of the necessary forms and agreements will be distributed.
-See pages B-H.

SESSION TWO. 2 HOURS

TOOLS OF THE TRADE.

***Photographs and resumes.**

-Discussion on the purpose of the photo/resume.
-Qualities of a good photo.
  -truthful-looks like you.
  -present.
  -simple.
  -direct.
-Qualities of a good resume.
  -clear.
  -simple.
  -truthful.
  -short.
-Examples of good and bad photos and resumes will be shown and discussed.
-Discussion on looking for a photographer.

Assignment: At the end of term each student must have produced a photo and a resume.

***Cover Letters.**

-Discussion on the purpose of a cover letter.
  -to introduce the actor.
  -to interest the recipient in the actor.
  -to give facts about the actor.
  -to request a meeting/audition.
-Qualities of a good cover letter.
  -direct.
  -positive.
  -exciting.
  -humorous.

Assignment: At the end of the term each student must produce a cover letter.

Assignment: At the end of the term each student must produce a list of at least 20 people to whom they could mail a picture, resume and letter. Names and addresses to be included. This list could include theatres, casting directors, production houses, or agents depending on their career focus.

***Follow up to mailings.**

-Phone calls.

-Discussion of the purpose of follow up phone calls.

-to speak to the person to whom you mailed your resume package.

-to make sure the pic/res. arrived.

-to set up an audition/interview.

-to update info you have on the theatre, casting director, or production company.

-to find out the best way to stay in touch with the person you are mailing to.

-Qualities of follow up phone calls.

-be clear and concise.

-don't run off at the mouth. Keep it short and to the point.

-be relaxed.

-be warm.

-be easy.

-be centered.

***Organization.**

-A discussion of ideas on how the actor can set up and maintain a good business routine for themselves.

-Areas covered will be.

-your work space.

-audition notebooks.

-contact files.

-datebooks.

-phonemachine.

***Audition Monologues.**

-Discussion on what a monologue can and should do for the actor.

-Quotes from artistic directors on what they like to see in a monologue.

-Qualities of a good monologue.

-it's in your age range.

-it is in your emotional range.

-has a point of view.

-is short.

-contrasting. Contrasts with other monologues if more than one is required.

-simple and honest.

-has a sense of structure

-has variety within it.

***Audition songs.**

-Discussion on what a good audition song can and should do for the actor.
-Qualities of a good audition song.
-that it's your age.
-that the music is in your range.
-has a point of view.
-short.
-simple.
-has a sense of humor, not an angry song.
-that it is "you".

Assignment: By a date given 2 monologues and 1 song will be prepared. These to be used in a mock audition class.

SESSION THREE. 2 HOURS.

***Setting career goals.**

-Discussion of how setting goals can support students in their careers.
-look at career vision from session one.
-look at current reality.
-space in between is where goal setting comes in. The immediate steps you take to achieving what you want.
-Definition of goals.
-a goal is a clear direction you are moving in your career. It is a career result you want to obtain.
-Guidelines for making career goals.
-is the goal clear to you?
-if you achieved the goal would you recognize it?
-is it workable-challenging but not overwhelming, nor too safe?
-is there a date or a number on the goal? ie: # of commercials booked, by what date?
-do you want this goal? If you could have it would you take it?
-Discussion on different time frames for goal setting.
-5 year plan.
-1 year and 6 month plans.
-weekly goal setting.
-Thoughts about setting goals.
-it's your game.
-you make it up.
-goal setting is not a prison. You are at choice and can change your goals as your career shifts.(Now I've set this so I have to achieve it.)
-Distribution of and discussion on how to use goal sheets. See page I-J.

***Support Grouops.**

-Discussion on how a support group can assist you in realizing your career goals.
-Use the groups already established for the co-op project as support groups.
-Discussion of different structures and operations for support groups.

***Marketing plans for self generated employment project.**

-Discussion on application of skills learned so far to put together a marketing plan to promote the students self generated employment projects.
-Examples of successful marketing plans will be given.
-Suggestions of possible grants, or financial assistance programs that may be available to the students will be given.

Assginment: At the end of the term students must produce a marketing plan for their self generated work project.

Assignment: For the following session each student should come prepared to present themselves on-camera for two minutes. A personal monologue.

SESSION FOUR. 2 HOURS.

***Presentation.**

-Each student takes 2 minutes to present themselves on-camera.
    -Presentation must be a personal monologue.
    -In the students own words.
    -Students must dress exactly as they want to present themselves.
-Review of tape with discussion of each students presentation.
    -comments from class on what works and doesn't work about each presentation.
    -qualities list on each presentation from class.
    -possible roles list.
-Presentation qualities.
    -open.
    -warm.
    -easy.
    -centered.
    -accessible.
    -focused.
    -humorous.

-Discussion on being responsible for your presentation. Being aware of yourself and your effect.
-Presentation and discussion of self generated employment ideas.

SESSION FIVE. 8 HOURS

***Auditioning for film and T.V. Linda Darlow, Instructor.**

-Opening lecture and remarks.
-Taping mock interviewes and auditions (cold copy).
    -students will play C.D and interview each other.
-Play back and discussion.
    -points of interview.
    -essences/qualities/roles.
-General questions and answers.

SESSION SIX. 8 HOURS.

***Auditioning for the musical theatre. Alisa Kort, Instructor.**

-This class is structured around preparing material and oneself for an audition.
-Information covered in the class:
    -entering the audition space.
    -working with the accompanist.
    -body language-physical life of a song.
    -interpretation.
    -text study.
    -choosing material.
    -presentation and appearance.
-Students will use the song they have choosen for their mock theatre audition.

SESSION SEVEN. 2 HOURS.

***Mock theatre audition.**

-Using the audition pieces assigned in session 2 the students are put through a mock theatre audition.
-Instructor plays the director conducting the audition.
-The audition will consist of a brief interview and the performance of the audition pieces.
-After every student has gone the class will discuss each audition.
-Discussion will focus on:
    -what worked/didn't work about the interview.
    -how effective was the choice of the audition material.
    -did the students overall presentation work in the audition.
    -the general response the class had to each audition.

SESSION EIGHT. 2 HOURS.

***Equity and ACTRA.**

-Representatives from equity and ACTRA will briefly present information on their respective associations.

-Presentation will focus on:

- -history of the association.
- -purpose of the association.
- -on becoming a member.
- -working under equity and ACTRA contracts.
- -benefits and services provided to the actor by each association.

-A general question and answer period will follow each of the representatives presentations.

SESSION NINE. 2 HOURS.

***Casting directors, agents, and artistic directors.**

-Representatives from a local casting office, an agent and an artistic director will discuss their functions in the industry.

-Discussion will focus on:

- -contacting agents, C.D. and A.D.
- -setting up auditions.
- -how to remain in contact.
- -what they are looking for in clients and talent.
- -the relationship between actors and agents, C.D. and A.D.

-A general question and answer period for the students will follow.

SESSION TEN. 2 HOURS.

***Taxation and financial planning. Karen Wikberg, Instructor.**

-Discussion will focus on:

- -preparing for taxation.
- -reductions for self employment.
- -preparing tax forms.
- -monthly and weekly budgeting.
- -R.R.S.P. and investment.
- -deductions on weekly pay cheques.

-A general question and answer period will follow Karen's presentation.

SESSION ELEVEN. 2 HOURS.

***Self generated employment project.**

-Each student or group will perform their self generated employment project.

-Each student or group will present and discuss their marketing plan for their project.

-General class discussion and brain storming session for each of the projects and marketing plans presented.

SESSION TWELVE. 2 HOURS.

***Project presentation and wrap-up class.**

-Students will present all other projects assigned to them during the term.

-presentation and discussion of pictures/resumes, cover letters, and mailing lists.

-presentation of co-op plans. (these must be zeroxed and a copy given to each group for discussion after presentation.)

-"No business" exercise.

-Discussion:

-having your life be successful separate from you career.

-being responsible for the present condition of the theatre and making choices for the future of the community.

-Brief personal evaluation of each student by the instructor.

-General questions and wrap-up.

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